Parents Hopes & Concerns About the Impact of Media on their Children

Report on the Findings of a National Survey of Parents

conducted by

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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INTRODUCTION

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ("The Conference" or "USCCB") recognizes the significant and growing impact that media has in the lives of children and families. As a Church with more than 68 million Catholics in more than 19,000 Catholic parishes in the United States, the USCCB is committed to assisting its member families in navigating the digital landscape.

To best understand American parents' concerns about media's impact on their children and what resources they are seeking, the USCCB decided to ask them directly by commissioning a national telephone survey of parents. This report presents the results of this survey.

We believe these results offer valuable insights for policymakers, the entertainment industry, advocacy organizations, churches and families. The parents' surveyed report they are engaged in their children's media lives and also want more assistance in this area from both government and the entertainment industry. We hope these findings contribute to the ongoing conversation about how to best protect and empower children in the digital world.

METHODOLOGY

The results presented here are based on a national random digit dial telephone survey of 500 parents of children ages 2–14.

The survey was designed and analyzed by the staff at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The survey was conducted from February 16–20, 2010 by the Issues and Answers firm located in Virginia Beach, VA.

The margin of error from sampling is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary highlights the major findings from the survey.

Parents are deeply concerned about media content

High percentages of parents say they are concerned about inappropriate content in media and want to be able to control it. Over 80 percent say they want to be able to control access to media content that depicts violence, sex, illegal drug use, alcohol abuse and profane language.

Parents concerned about portrayals of substance abuse

Parents are as concerned about media portrayals of illegal drug use and alcohol abuse, which are often not included in ratings and blocking systems, as they are about violence, sexual content and profane language, which have been traditionally covered by ratings systems for parental controls.

Parents are most concerned about inappropriate content on television and the Internet

Parents say they are more concerned about inappropriate content on one of the oldest media platforms (TV) and one of the newest (Internet) than about video games, cell phones or music.

Parents are engaged in monitoring their children's media usage

Parents are making significant efforts to ensure their children are exposed to the media they think are appropriate. Over 90 percent say their family has rules about what media their children can use and watch. Over half say they use parental controls for television, Internet and video games.

Factors that would increase use of parental controls

Two-thirds say they would increase their use of parental controls if i) they understood parental controls better; ii) they could block TV ads they think contain inappropriate content; and iii) they could purchase media products with parental controls already set.

Parents want media makers and government to do more

Parents don't want to do it alone – they want industry and government to help protect children from inappropriate media content. Three-fourths say makers of media products should do more, while 58 percent also say government should also do more.

Parents are frustrated with inappropriate content in television advertisements and want tools to address it

Sixty-one percent say they are concerned about ads with inappropriate content and three-fourths say would use parental controls more if they could block such content in TV ads.

Parents open to using V-Chip

These findings suggest that more parents are using V-Chip that was previously thought and three-fourths of those surveyed identify four initiatives that would increase their V-Chip usage.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand media content ratings

Media ratings systems need to be expanded to include not only violent, sexual and language content, but also illegal drug use, alcohol abuse, and smoking.

Don't overlook the impact of TV content

It would be a mistake for policymakers to place greater emphasis on newer media such as the Internet and social networking to the detriment of "older" media such as television, since parents name both television and Internet as the two media platforms about which they are most concerned.

Help parents who want to be able to block inappropriate content in TV ads

This survey demonstrates that parents want the ability to block TV ads that they feel contain inappropriate content. USCCB requests that the policymakers and broadcasters develop resources to empower parents and other TV viewers to block unwanted TV ads.

Support parents who want to use parental controls

USCCB recommends three initiatives that two-thirds of parents say would increase their use of parental controls: i) Educate parents on how to use parental controls; ii) offer parents the ability to block TV ads they think contain inappropriate content; and iii) encourage manufacturers of media products such as TVs and video games to produce models with the parental controls already set.

Continue to support V-Chip

This survey identified a number of ways to increase parental usage of the V-Chip: make V-Chip easier to use, expand V-Chip to allow for blocking of unwanted advertising content, and use V-Chip to help parents find programs that are beneficial to their children. USCCB encourages the promotion and support all of these initiatives.

Adopt a comprehensive approach

The debate about protecting children in the digital world is often split between those who advocate parental responsibility and those who seek greater involvement from the government and/or industry. The parents surveyed for this report seem to want both. Many say they are knowledgeable about and use parental controls and they also want to see both makers of media products and government take a more active role.

USCCB encourages policymakers to utilize the input parents offer in this survey to provide improved tools and resources that ensure a safer and more enriching environment for America's next generation.
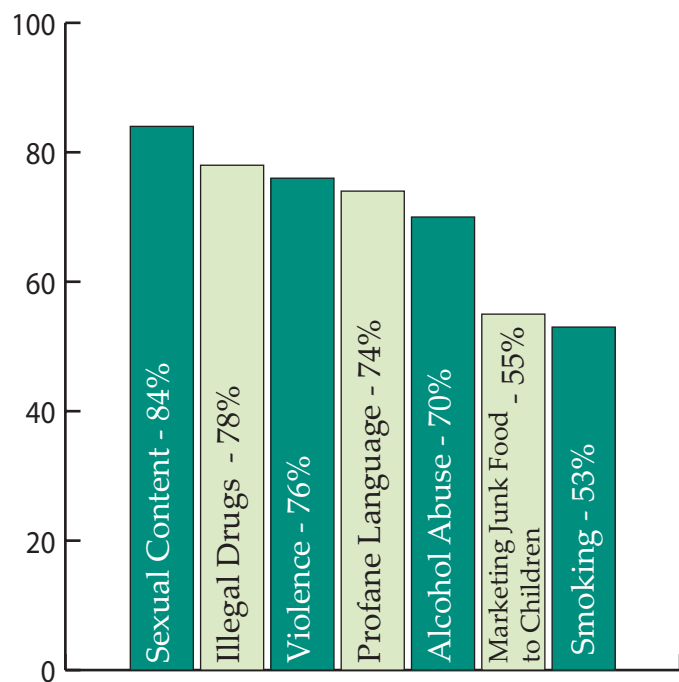
Survey Findings

Inappropriate Content in Media

A. Types of Inappropriate Content

Parents are as concerned about portrayals of illegal drug use and alcohol abuse (which are less frequently included in media content ratings) as they are about the ratings traditional areas of focus – violence, sex and profane language.

Chart 1

Parents who are concerned or very concerned with different types of media content

- Sexual Content - 84%
- Illegal Drugs - 78%
- Violence - 76%
- Profane Language - 74%
- Alcohol Abuse - 70%
- Marketing Junk Food to Children - 55%
- Smoking - 53%

Ratings systems for parental controls have typically focused on violence, sexual content and profane language – and the results in Chart 1 confirm that parents are indeed very concerned about each of these three. However, parents appear to be equally concerned about media portrayals of illegal drug use and alcohol abuse, which are often not included in ratings

and blocking systems.

It is noteworthy that while more than half say they are also concerned about content that features smoking and marketing junk food to children, the concern is less common than for the other five items in the list.
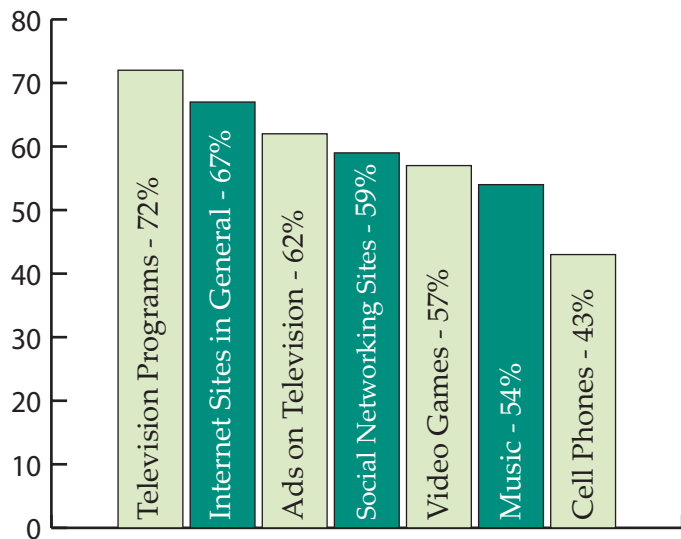
B. Inappropriate Content

More parents are concerned about inappropriate content on television and the Internet than for any other form of media.

These results indicate that more than half of parents are concerned about inappropriate content on nearly everyone media platform. However, they appear to be most concerned about inappropriate content on TV and the Internet, which represent one of the oldest media platforms (TV) and one of the newest (Internet). The next two platforms (TV ads and social networking sites) reinforce this focus.

Chart 2

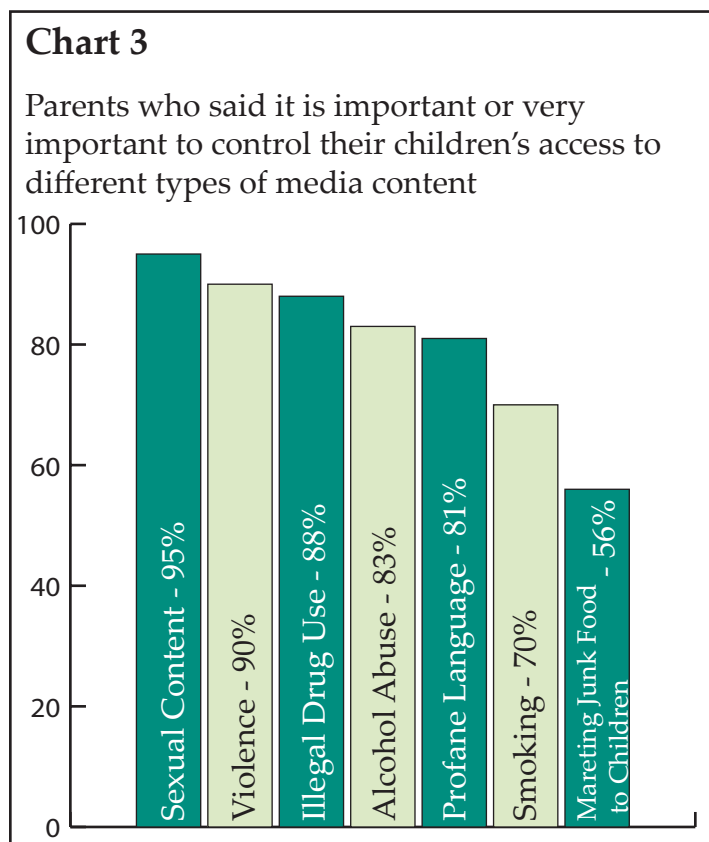Parents who are concerned or very concerned about inappropriate content in different types of media

- Television Programs - 72%
- Internet Sites in General - 67%
- Ads on Television - 62%
- Social Networking Sites - 59%
- Video Games - 57%
- Music - 54%
- Cell Phones - 43%

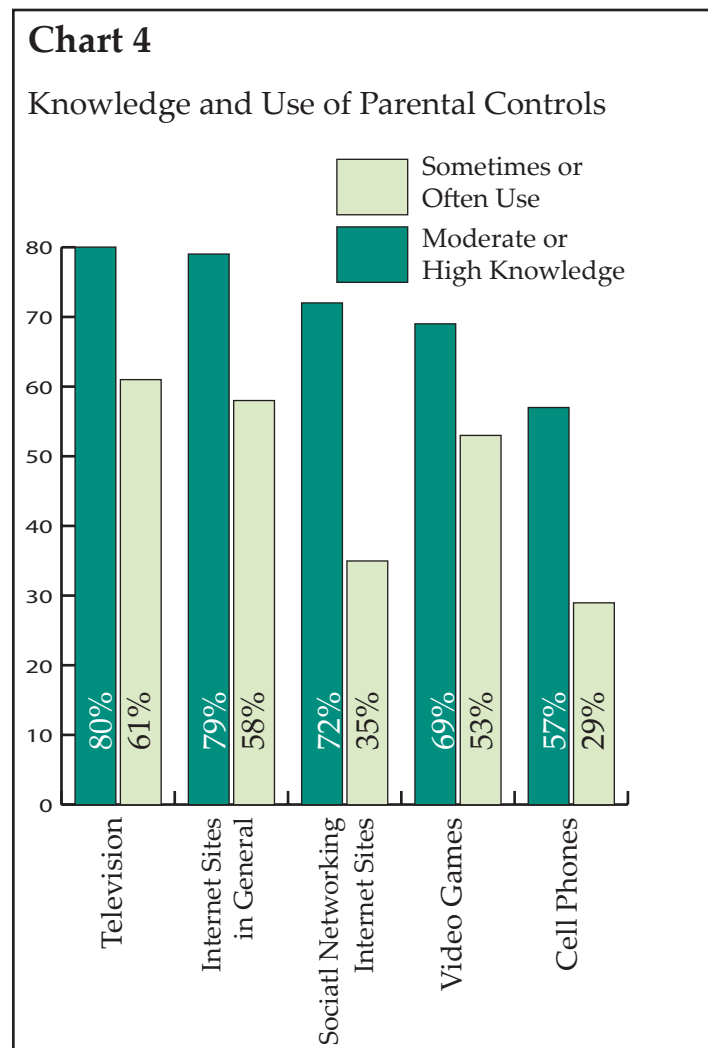# SURVEY FINDINGS

Control of children's access to media content

Parents believe it is very important to be in control of their children's access to inappropriate media content.

Chart 3

Parents who said it is important or very important to control their children's access to different types of media content

Sexual Content - 95%	
Violence - 90%	
Illegal Drug Use - 88%	
Alcohol Abuse - 83%	
Profane Language - 81%	
Smoking - 70%	
Mareting Junk Food - 56% to Children	

Over 80 percent say they want to be able to control access to media content that depicts violence, sex, illegal drug use, alcohol abuse and profane language. The percentage that wants control over portrayals of smoking and marketing junk food to children is lower, but still over 50 percent.

Knowledge and Use of Parental Controls

Parents are engaged in trying to make use of the tools available to them.

Chart 4

Knowledge and Use of Parental Controls

Sometimes or Often Use

Moderate or High Knowledge

Television	Internet Sites in General	Sociatl Networking Internet Sites	Video Games	Cell Phones
80% / 61%	79% / 58%	72% / 35%	69% / 53%	57% / 29%

Two-thirds say they have at least a moderate knowledge of parental controls for TV, video games, social networking sites and other internet sites (and over half say they have at least a moderate knowledge of controls for cell phones). They also report that they try to use parental controls for each of these platforms.

Survey Findings

Helping Parents with Parental Controls

Parents don't want to do it alone – they want industry and government to help protect children from inappropriate media content.

Chart 5

Percentage of parents who Moderately and Strongly agree with industry and government help with Parental Controls

Bar chart:
- Standard Ratings System – 69%
- Media Makers Do More – 75%
- Government Do More – 58%
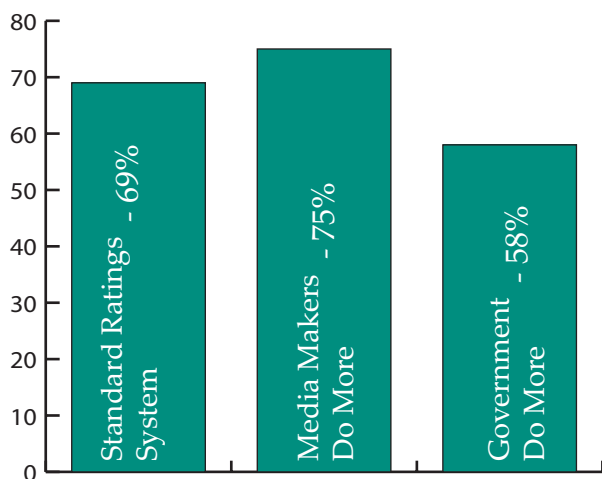
A higher percentage (75 percent) say makers of media products should do more, but 58 percent also say government should do more. Taken together, these results suggest that parents expect more assistance from government and the media industry than they have received to date.
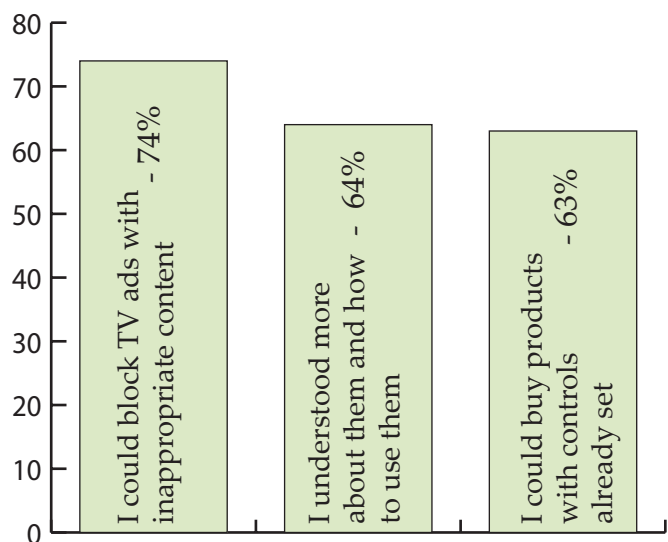
Seven in ten would like to a see a standard rating system for all media rather than separate ones for each type of media. One explanation for this would be that a standard rating for all media would be easier to learn than separate systems for each type of media.

Increasing Use of Parental Controls

Parents clearly identify three initiatives that would increase their use of parental controls.

Chart 6

Percentage of parents who Moderately and Strongly agree they would "use parental controls more if..."

Bar chart:
- I could block TV ads with inappropriate content – 74%
- I understood more about them and how to use them – 64%
- I could buy products with controls already set – 63%

More than half of the parents surveyed say there are several initiatives that would increase their use of parental controls The first iniiative is the ability to block unwanted television ads, an option that three-fourths of those surveyed say would increase their use of parental controls.

Approximately two-thirds say they would use parental controls more if they understood them better, which suggests the need for increased education efforts. Sixty-three percent say they would be more likely to use parental controls if they could buy products with these controls already set.

Survey Findings

Family Use of Media

Parents are making significant efforts to ensure their children are exposed to the media they think are appropriate.

Chart 7

How much does each of the following statements describe you and your family?

	Somewhat	Very Much	Somewhat or Very Much
My children are exposed to inappropriate content in the media they use.	22%	4%	27%
I rely more on the opinions of other parents about media (TV, movies, video games, internet) than I do on ratings information.	32%	13%	45%
Our family has rules about what media our children can use and watch (such as how much, what type of content, etc.).	12%	82%	94%
Ratings information for TV shows, movies, and video games helps me decide whether to let my children view or use it.	32%	52%	84%

More than nine in ten say their family has rules about what media their children can watch and eight in ten say they use the media ratings information in making their decision about what to allow their children to view or use. In fact, they are more likely to say they rely on ratings information than on the opinions of other parents.
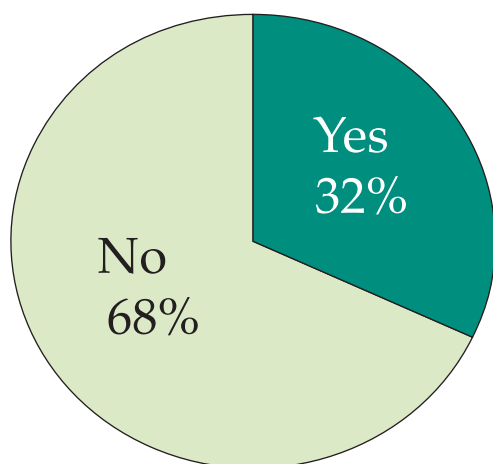
Survey Findings

V-Chip Use

Parents indicate there are multiple conditions that would increase their usage of V-Chip

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Chart 8

Have you or another adult in your household ever programmed your V-chip parental controls to block TV shows you don't want your children to watch?

No
68%

Yes
32%

These findings suggest that more parents are using V-Chip that was previously thought (32 percent versus 17 percent in a recent study[1]) and three-fourths of those surveyed identify four initiatives that would increase their V-Chip usage. A fifth initiative received support from two-thirds of respondents.

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1 Parents, Children & Media, A Kaiser Family Foundation Survey (June 2007) (available at http://www.kff.org/ entmedia/ upload/7638.pdf)

Three of these initiatives involve a V-Chip that helps parents find positive programs for their children (programs that match their children's interests, what children are learning in school, or those that are recommend for children and teens). The other two initiatives are a V-Chip that can block unwanted ads and offering televisions that have a button on the remote control.

Chart 9

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about using the V-chip, which is a parental control technology for television. "I would be more likely to use V-Chip parental controls if ..."

	Moderately or Strongly Agree
I could use the V-chip to find TV programs that support what my child is learning at school.	75%
I could use the V-chip to find TV programs that match my child's interests.	75%
I could use the V-chip to block TV ads I think are inappropriate.	74%
I had a V-chip button on my TV remote control.	68%
I could use the V-chip to find informative programs recommended for children or teens.	68%
I could buy a TV that had the appropriate V-chip levels already programmed.	55%

Appendix:
Survey Response Frequencies

Table 1: *How concerned are you about different types of media content?*

	Not at All Concerned	A Little Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Concerned	Very Concerned
Violence	4%	5%	14%	19%	57%
Sexual Content	3%	4%	11%	14%	70%
Profane Language	4%	7%	15%	22%	52%
Smoking	12%	10%	25%	23%	30%
Illegal Drugs	6%	4%	13%	18%	60%
Alcohol Abuse	6%	6%	18%	24%	17%
Marketing Junk Food to Children	12%	11%	23%	27%	28%

Total Number of Respondents: 500
Total who skipped this question: 0

Table 2: *How concerned are you about inappropriate content in different types of media?*

	Not at All Concerned	A Little Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Concerned	Very Concerned
Television Programs	5%	6%	18%	20%	52%
Ads on Television	7%	10%	22%	21%	41%
Video Games	14%	10%	19%	22%	36%
Music	11%	12%	23%	21%	33%
Cell Phones	27%	11%	19%	17%	26%
Social Networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook	19%	8%	14%	19%	40%
Internet Sites in General	11%	8%	15%	21%	45%

Total Number of Respondents: 498
Total who skipped this question: 2

APPENDIX:
SURVEY RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Table 3: *How important is it to you to be able to control your children's access to the following types of media content?*

	Not at All Important	A Little Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Violence	1%	4%	6%	21%	69%
Sexual Content	2%	1%	4%	13%	80%
Profane Language	3%	2%	14%	22%	58%
Smoking	8%	6%	16%	25%	46%
Illegal Drug Use	2%	3%	7%	17%	71%
Alcohol Abuse	2%	4%	11%	22%	61%
Marketing Junk Food to Your Children	11%	9%	24%	25%	31%

Total Number of Respondents: 499 / 378 (for violence, sexual content, profane language)
Total who skipped this question: 1

Table 4: *Please indicate your level of knowledge of parental controls that are available for the following types of media.*

	No Knowledge	Low Knowledge	Moderate Knowledge	High Knowledge
Television	6%	15%	44%	35%
Video Games	13%	18%	33%	36%
Cell Phones	19%	24%	30%	27%
Social Networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook	11%	17%	39%	32%
Internet sites in general	7%	14%	41%	38%

Total Number of Respondents: 500
Total who skipped this question: 0

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APPENDIX:
SURVEY RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Table 5: *How often do you use parental controls for different types of media?*

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Don't Have/ Use this Media
Television	25%	9%	13%	49%	5%
Video Games	26%	9%	10%	42%	13%
Cell Phones	31%	7%	7%	21%	33%
Social Networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook	29%	6%	4%	31%	30%
Internet sites in general	19%	7%	12%	47%	16%

Total Number of Respondents: 500
Total who skipped this question: 0

Table 6: *How much do you agree or disagree with the following…*

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I would like to a see a standard rating system for all media rather than separate ones for each type of media.	7%	7%	6%	11%	26%	43%
Makers of media products should do more to help parents deal with inappropriate content.	5%	7%	4%	10%	21%	54%
Government should do more to help protect children from inappropriate content.	17%	7%	8%	11%	21%	36%

Total Number of Respondents: 499
Total who skipped this question: 1

APPENDIX:
SURVEY RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Table 7: *How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about using parental controls for media? "I would be more likely to use parental controls if ..."*

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I understood more about parental controls and how to use them.	11%	8%	6%	11%	25%	39%
I could block TV ads I think contain inappropriate content.	7%	6%	5%	9%	20%	54%
I could buy media products such as TVs and video games with parental controls already set.	12%	9%	6%	11%	19%	43%

Total Number of Respondents: 500
Total who skipped this question: 0

Table 8: *How much does each of the following statements describe you and your family?*

	Not at all	Only a little	Somewhat	Very Much
My children are exposed to inappropriate content in the media they use.	36%	37%	22%	4%
I rely more on the opinions of other parents about media (TV, movies, video games, internet), than I do on ratings information.	37%	18%	32%	13%
Our family has rules about what media our children can use and watch (such as how much, what type of content, etc.).	4%	2%	12%	82%
Ratings information for TV shows, movies, and video games helps me decide whether to let my children view or use it.	9%	7%	32%	52%

Total Number of Respondents: 500
Total who skipped this question: 0

APPENDIX: SURVEY RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Table 9: *Have you or another adult in your household ever programmed your V-chip parental controls to block TV shows you don't want your children to watch?*

	No	Yes	Don't Know
Programmed V-chip parental controls	68%	32%	0.60%

Total Number of Respondents: 498
Total who skipped this question: 2

Table 10: *How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about using the V-chip, which is a parental control technology for television? "I would be more likely to use V-Chip parental controls if ..."*

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I had a V-chip button on my TV remote control.	14%	4%	5%	10%	19%	49%
I could use the V-chip to block TV ads I think are inappropriate.	9%	5%	2%	11%	18%	55%
I could buy a TV that had the appropriate V-chip levels already programmed.	17%	9%	8%	11%	21%	34%
I could use the V-chip to find informative programs recommended for children or teens.	11%	3%	4%	14%	23%	45%
I could use the V-chip to find TV programs that support what my child is learning at school.	8%	3%	3%	11%	22%	53%
I could use the V-chip to find TV programs that match my child's interests.	8%	2%	4%	11%	25%	50%

Total Number of Respondents: 499
Total who skipped this question: 1

APPENDIX:
SURVEY RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Table 11a: *Age*

	Age
Mean	38.61
Std. Dev.	6.9
Maximum	74
Minimum	20

Total Number of Respondents: 484
Total who skipped this question: 16

Table 11b: *Age by Decade*

Age	Percent
20-29	9%
30-39	48%
40-49	39%
50-59	4%
>60	0.83%

Total Number of Respondents: 484
Total who skipped this question: 16

Table 11c: *Gender*

	Male	Female
Gender	40%	60%

Total Number of Respondents: 495
Total who skipped this question: 5

Table 11d: *Zipcode*

Respondents to the survey come from 455 different zip codes, which indicates a strong geographic diversity.

The most frequent zip code (95035) occurs only four times.

Table 12: *Number of Children*

Number	Percent
1	20%
2	50%
3	16%
4	6%
>5	3%

Total Number of Respondents: 500
Total who skipped this question: 0
Average Age Oldest Child: 9.01
Average Age Youngest Child: 5.65

Table 13: *Ethnicity*

	Percent
White/Caucasian	76%
Black/African American	5%
Hispanic/Latino	6%
Asian	5%
Native American	0.41%
Mixed race	5%
Other	2%

Total Number of Respondents: 492
Total who skipped this question: 8

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APPENDIX:
SURVEY RESPONSE FREQUENCIES

Table 14: *Last Grade Completed in School*

	Percent
Some grade school (1-8)	0.20%
Some high school (9-11)	0.82%
Graduated high school	134%
Technical/vocational school	2%
Some college	16%
Graduated college	40%
Graduate/professional	27%

Total Number of Respondents: 489
Total who skipped this question: 11

Table 15: *Annual Household Income*

Household Income	Percent
Less than $15,000	2%
$15,000 - $19,999	2%
$20,000 - $29,999	3%
$30,000 - $49,999	13%
$50,000 - $74,999	23%
$75,000 - $99,999	23%
$100,000 or more	34%

Total Number of Respondents: 414
Total who skipped this question: 86

Table 16: *Religious Affiliation*

Religious Affiliation	Percent
Roman Catholic	29%
Christian, but not Roman Catholic	53%
Mormon	0.83%
Muslim	0.41%
Jewish	1%
Hindu	1%
Buddhist	0.62%
Not affiliated with a religious group	13%
Other	0.83%

Total Number of Respondents: 482
Total who skipped this question: 18

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is an assembly of the hierarchy of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands who jointly exercise certain pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States. The purpose of the Conference is to promote the greater good which the Church offers humankind, especially through forms and programs of the apostolate fittingly adapted to the circumstances of time and place. This purpose is drawn from the universal law of the Church and applies to the episcopal conferences which are established all over the world for the same purpose.

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